United Nations S/PV.6107

# Security Council

Sixty-fourth year

*Provisional*

**6107**th meeting

Monday, 20 April 2009, 10 a.m.

New York

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| *President:* | Mr. Heller | (Mexico) |
| *Members:* | Austria | Mr. Mayr-Harting |
| | Burkina Faso | Mr. Tiendrébéogo |
| | China | Mr. La Yifan |
| | Costa Rica | Mr. Guillermet |
| | Croatia | Mr. Vilović |
| | France | Mr. Ripert |
| | Japan | Mr. Takasu |
| | Libyan Arab Jamahiriya | Mr. Dabbashi |
| | Russian Federation | Mr. Churkin |
| | Turkey | Mr. Ilkin |
| | Uganda | Mr. Mugoya |
| | United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland | Mr. Quarrey |
| | United States of America | Mr. Wolff |
| | Viet Nam | Mr. Bui The Giang |

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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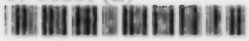

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.*

**Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

**The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question**

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

It is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Lynn Pascoe, to whom I give the floor.

**Mr. Pascoe**: It is a pleasure to be with the Council once again today discussing the important issue of the Middle East. We are again at an important juncture as the international community prepares to step up its diplomatic engagement towards the peace process. United States Envoy Senator George Mitchell met with Prime Minister Netanyahu on 16 April and with President Abbas the following day, midway through a regional tour. We welcome his stated commitment to vigorously pursue the creation of a Palestinian State as part of a comprehensive regional peace strategy of the Obama Administration which aims to integrate and develop the Arab Peace Initiative.

The Quartet remains firmly committed to the goal of a two-State solution. Quartet envoys met in the United Nations office in Ramallah on 17 April to discuss plans to advance the peace process and agreed to hold regular meetings in the region. The Secretary-General strongly supports a reinvigorated role for the Quartet. Next week, King Abdullah of Jordan will meet with President Obama during the first official visit by an Arab leader to discuss the regional peace process. Palestinian President Abbas is expected shortly afterwards, and, in May, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu plans to visit Washington following completion of an internal Israeli review of national security priorities.

The Secretary-General has welcomed the formation of the new Israeli Government, which was sworn in on 31 March. He stated his expectation that the Middle East peace process will resume, with the aim of achieving an independent and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace with a secure Israel, and a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace as envisaged in Security Council resolutions.

Allow me to turn to the situation in Gaza and southern Israel. During this reporting period there has been very little progress on the key elements outlined in Security Council resolution 1860 (2009): the commitment of the parties to a durable and sustainable ceasefire; opening the crossings for humanitarian access and materials for recovery; and intra-Palestinian reconciliation. For the international community to sustain its commitment to a resumption of the peace process, those principles are indispensable.

While there has been a significant drop in violent incidents this reporting period, the situation remains fragile in the absence of a proper ceasefire regime. Although there were almost two weeks without violence, there were 30 rockets and mortars fired by Palestinian militants at southern Israel, and the Israeli military carried out two air strikes in the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli army reported on 13 April that a Palestinian vessel laden with explosives exploded in the vicinity of an Israeli naval ship without causing injury. Egyptian efforts to combat smuggling continue, and on 15 April the Egyptian police reportedly found 900 kilogrammes of explosives along Egypt's border with Gaza. On 10 April, Egyptian security forces arrested 18 people for allegedly smuggling weapons and cash into Gaza.

The Israeli policy of near total closure of the Gaza Strip, which has been in force since the Hamas takeover in June 2007, has continued in the wake of Operation Cast Lead. Over 73 per cent of all imports during the reporting period consisted of foodstuffs and cleaning materials. Basic needs for the population, such as food and blankets, have largely been met. The strict limitation on foodstuffs and other commodities allows agencies to maintain basic relief services such as food distributions, which remain at the same levels this month as last month. The World Food Programme is reaching 365,000 beneficiaries; the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is reaching 750,000.

While we welcome the Israeli Cabinet decision to allow all kinds of foodstuffs into Gaza without restriction, we note that each individual food shipment still requires extensive coordination with the Israeli authorities. I would also note that our assistance to the people of Gaza should, of course, not be limited to food, blankets and medical supplies. Broader humanitarian assistance and early recovery are impossible without Israel providing adequate entry of fuel, cash and materials that are needed to repair schools, clinics, sanitation networks and shelters.

The total ban on the import of petrol and diesel has continued since 2 November 2008, with the exception of small quantities delivered to UNRWA. In the past month, Israel allowed the transfer of approximately half of Gaza's power plants' industrial fuel needs. As a result of the industrial fuel shortages, most Gazans continue to experience intermittent power cuts.

The ban on the import of spare parts necessary to maintain the electrical network and bring it up to full capacity exacerbates this situation. Some 10 per cent of the population remains without any electricity due to a lack of necessary materials needed to fix damage sustained to the network during Israel's military offensive. So far, only two truckloads of electrical transformers and cables have been allowed entry into Gaza since then.

Strict limitations on cash entering Gaza make many humanitarian and relief programmes impossible. On 7 April, Israel allowed in a transfer of only 50 million shekels out of 250 million requested to pay for the salaries of 60,000 Palestinian Authority staff. The total monthly cost of Palestinian Authority salaries in Gaza is 120 million shekels.

There is still limited material for network repairs. Only one truck of cement and a limited quantity of plastic piping were allowed entry into Gaza in the past month. They were used for some small-scale water and sanitation projects. The importance of improving water and sanitation is clear from clinical records at UNRWA primary health-care clinics in the Khan Younis area. Those records show that water and sanitation-related infectious diseases are increasingly prevalent in 2009 compared to the year 2008.

The lack of access to Gaza is deeply frustrating. At the 2 March donor conference hosted by the Government of Egypt at Sharm el-Sheikh, the international community pledged some $4.5 billion for the reconstruction of Gaza. The Palestinian reconciliation process that we all hoped would provide a framework for reconstruction has not, however, moved forward. The United Nations has and will continue to support early recovery and reconstruction efforts in Gaza. To that end, we are working to ensure our readiness to support programming once conditions allow for it. In order to further those efforts, the Special Coordinator and his Deputy are intensifying their visits to Gaza. However, without the materials for recovery and reconstruction the process cannot begin, and that requires a substantial easing by Israel of its policy of closure of the Gaza Strip, including steps to return to the framework of 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access.

With regard to the Gaza Board of Inquiry, on 8 April the Secretary-General received the members of the Board, who shared their conclusions and recommendations with the Secretary-General and informed him that they were still in the process of finalizing their report. He expects to receive the full report in the near future and to decide what to do at that point.

Following Prime Minister Fayyad's early resignation and the end of his Government's mandate, President Abbas asked him on 31 March to remain in office until a new Government was formed. Palestinian reconciliation talks adjourned for the third time on 2 April. While some progress was reportedly made in the talks, there has been no agreement on the composition or political platform of a transitional Government. Talks are scheduled to resume later this month. We continue to support Egyptian efforts aimed at uniting the Palestinian factions under one Government, under the leadership of President Abbas, on the basis of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) principles.

The divide between Gaza and the West Bank continues to grow at the expense of the population of Gaza, as can be seen with health referrals outside of Gaza. As a result of the Hamas takeover of the Referral Abroad Department on 22 March, only patients with referrals approved prior to that takeover and a small number of patients whose referrals are facilitated by the Peres Center for Peace and by Physicians for Human Rights were allowed access to special medical treatment. The United Nations is actively engaged with the Palestinian Authority and Hamas in Gaza to facilitate a resolution of that issue.

Five United Nations mine action teams continue to work in Gaza, conducting risk assessments and training in unexploded ordinance safety. There have been no developments regarding the location of the unexploded bombs that went missing in February 2009. A number of issues continue to await approval from the Israeli authorities, including agreement on a means by which specialized equipment can be imported into Israel. Israeli Corporal Gilad Shalit remains in captivity, despite Egyptian mediation efforts to secure his release in exchange for a number of the 11,000 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

Let me now turn to the efforts of the Palestinian Authority regarding institution-building and security reform. The international community continues to support those efforts and plans to convene the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in the next several weeks are being discussed. During this reporting period, the Palestinian Authority has begun revising and upgrading its budget process in preparation for the 2010 budget and 2011-2013 Palestinian Reform and Development Plan. Nevertheless, challenges remain, including the absence of timely and predictable budget support. Despite the large sums of money pledged last month in Sharm el-Sheikh, the Palestinian Authority still has great difficulty paying monthly salaries, which severely impacts its long-term planning process and undermines the reform agenda.

On Palestinian security issues in the West Bank, the reporting period has witnessed an increase in activity by Palestinian Authority forces. They targeted criminal gangs, making a number of arrests and recovering a quantity of weapons and stolen cash, and also shut down a reported explosives manufacturing laboratory in a mosque in Qalqiliya. During the reporting period, 10 Palestinians were killed in the West Bank and 95 were injured as a result of clashes with the Israel Defense Forces and settlers. Those incidents included seven violent instances in which Israeli settlers targeted Palestinians and their property, which, however, was down from 26 such incidents in the previous period.

On 2 April, a 13-year-old Israeli was killed in an attack on a settlement, in which another Israeli child was injured. On 8 April, clashes erupted between approximately 200 Israeli settlers, some armed, and the residents of the Palestinian village of Sofa, where the killer had reportedly sought refuge. The Israeli army intervened and 15 Palestinians were injured, including 11 by live ammunition from Israeli troops and settlers. Six other Israelis were reportedly injured during the period.

Elsewhere in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, Israeli settlement activity continues. Major construction work is under way in the three settlement blocs surrounding East Jerusalem to the North, East and South. In addition to the construction of housing units, road infrastructure construction is ongoing, creating further obstacles to a viable, contiguous Palestinian State. On 31 March, Israeli settlers from the Efrat settlement began their own construction of a road. As we have said repeatedly, settlement activity runs contrary to the basis of the two-State solution and must be frozen.

The number of obstacles to continued movement in the West Bank remains constant at more than 600, which continues to prevent normal social and economic life. Also in the West Bank, the barrier continues to be constructed within occupied Palestinian territory in deviation from the Green Line and contrary to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. The Government of Israel has taken no action to evacuate settlement outposts during this reporting period in accordance with its Road Map obligations.

East Jerusalem remains an issue of serious concern. Palestinian institutions there remain closed by Israeli order and contrary to Israel's Road Map obligations. During this reporting period, Israeli authorities demolished two Palestinian structures, in addition to the so-called deterrent demolition of the family home of a Palestinian who carried out a terrorist attack against Israelis on 2 July 2008. During that demolition, a Palestinian man was shot and killed as he drove his car into Israeli security forces. Three Israeli border police were injured.

Turning to regional affairs, the Secretary-General attended the League of Arab States summit on 30 March in Doha, which brought together 17 Arab leaders. The summit recommitted the members of the Arab League to the Arab Peace Initiative while calling for Israeli steps towards the Initiative.

United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert Serry met with Jordanian Minister for Foreign Affairs Nasser Judeh on 8 April and on 15 April with Syrian Minister for Foreign Affairs Walid Al-Moualem to discuss efforts to move the peace process forward.

The situation in the occupied Syrian Golan was quiet during the reporting period, although Israeli settlement activity continues. One Syrian was detained by Israeli security forces for crossing the Alpha Line in the disengagement area on 14 April and returned to Syria the same day.

In Egypt, it was announced that a cell of 49 persons led by an alleged member of Hizbollah had been arrested in November 2008. The Egyptian Government expressed its grave concern at external interference on sovereign Egyptian territory. The search for other members of this cell is reportedly continuing.

On Lebanon, the overall situation there remained stable during the reporting period, despite a number of disconcerting security incidents. The assassination of the Deputy PLO representative in Lebanon, Kamal Medhat, on 23 March, which was reported in last month's briefing, was the first targeted killing in Lebanon since September 2008. On 27 March, a shooting incident took place in Baalbek between gunmen suspected of drug trafficking and the Lebanese Armed Forces, resulting in the death of an alleged drug baron. Subsequently, on 13 April, in what seems to have been a related incident, armed gunmen ambushed a Lebanese Armed Forces patrol in a nearby area, leaving four soldiers dead and one critically injured. The Lebanese Armed Forces are continuing their search for the perpetrators. Syria has deployed troops along the border between the two countries in order to prevent fugitives from escaping across the frontier.

The five-week period for candidates to register for the June parliamentary elections ended on 7 April. Seven hundred and two candidates have been registered, although, according to the electoral law, they can withdraw from the race until 21 April. Discussion of candidate lists continues within each of the two major alliances contesting the election.

The construction of an additional 232 temporary shelters in the area adjacent to the Nahr al-Bared camp was completed in March, bringing the total amount of temporary shelters built by UNRWA to more than 800, housing some 650 families. Relations between the local community and the Lebanese Armed Forces have improved in recent months following an easing of access in areas adjacent to the old camp.

Following the establishment of diplomatic ties between Lebanon and Syria on 15 October 2008 and the approval by President Sleiman of the first Syrian ambassador to Lebanon, the Lebanese ambassador to the Syrian Arab Republic arrived in Damascus today.

The overall situation during the past month in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has remained generally quiet. UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces continue to carry out intensive joint operations, with a particular focus on possible rocket launching positions. Israeli air violations continued on an almost daily basis during the reporting period.

I cannot overemphasize the importance of addressing the situation in Gaza and of implementing the provisions of resolution 1860 (2009). Moreover, for the sake of the people of the region, there must be peace and not simply further process. We therefore encourage the early resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations on all core issues without exception, as agreed by the parties and as called for in resolution 1850 (2008).

The international community remains fundamentally committed to and engaged in efforts to achieve the goal of the two-State solution, the only solution aimed at guaranteeing both the security of the State of Israel and the creation of an independent and viable Palestinian State. The framework for peace remains unchanged: the establishment of two States living side by side in peace and security on the basis of the principle of land for peace and a just and comprehensive regional peace consistent with resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

*The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.*